



CASTROVILLE

Historic Preservation Action Plan

October 2002

Texas Historical Commission

Published by
Texas Historical Commission
2002



**TEXAS
HISTORICAL
COMMISSION**

The State Agency for Historic Preservation

www.thc.state.tx.us



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

The State Agency for Historic Preservation

RICK PERRY, GOVERNOR

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F. LAWRENCE OAKS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

October 2002

To the Preservation Community of Castroville:

Congratulations! You have shown terrific spirit and enthusiasm as a pilot community for our Visionaries in Preservation program. As you know, the built environment in Castroville was influenced by a unique convergence of sources. These historically significant structures add not only to the character of Medina County, but also to the state, and to the entire nation. Your groundbreaking work will serve to inspire and engage future communities interested in defining the future of their preservation efforts through visioning and planning.


Throughout the process of developing this plan, you have continually been asked to answer and refine your answers to four important questions: Where are we now? Where are we going? Where do we want to be? How can we get there? Your answers to these questions form the backbone of the enclosed action plan. The ability to continually reassess these same questions will provide the sparks for you to successfully implement the plan.

We at the Texas Historical Commission are proud to list Castroville as an example of a community that is sensitive to preservation and motivated to proactively manage the future of its historic assets. You are an inspiration to us all—best wishes as you carry this important effort forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. Lawrence Oaks". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, prominent "O" at the end.

F. Lawrence Oaks
Executive Director



Castroville is a community where its residents are leaders in preserving and protecting their unique historic, cultural and natural environment and effectively use it as the foundation for economic prosperity, tourism, managed growth and an excellent quality of life. Castroville is a community that simultaneously maintains its rural identity and sense of place while shaping and benefiting from regional growth.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Texas Historical Commission thanks the following interdisciplinary team for their participation in the community visioning process and the development of the Castroville Historic Preservation Action Plan:

Tracey Althans, Visionaries in Preservation Program, THC
Annette Bethke, Visionaries in Preservation Program, THC
Darrin Biedeger, design consultant
Teresa Franks, Heritage Tourism Program, THC
Peter Ketter, National Register Program, THC
Kit Neumann, Museum Services Program, THC
Anne Shelton, Visionaries in Preservation Program, THC
Mary Alice Torres-MacDonald, Community Heritage Development Division, THC
Greg Smith, National Register Program, THC
Jim Temple, landscape architect, Texas Parks and Wildlife
Bratten Thomason, Certified Local Government Program, THC

Thanks also to all the volunteer community members who served on the leadership committee and taskforces and contributed their time, energy and vision for Castroville, including:

Connie Balmos	Trinket Milword
James Bell	Edna Ortega
Janie Brock	Carole Romano
Mary Louise Burell	Louis Romano
Helen Delevan	Bill Seuhs
Linda Follis	Joan Tinar
Royce Groff	Sammy Tschirhart
Mayor Robert Hancock	Joanne Van Winkle
David Koch	

Special thanks to Albert “Boo” Hausser, chair of Castroville’s visioning leadership committee, whose enthusiasm and assistance was invaluable.



INTRODUCTION

Twenty miles from downtown San Antonio and nestled in the Medina Valley sits Castroville, more a village in feel than a city. Castroville was officially settled in 1844 by Henri Castro and a cadre of immigrants recruited primarily from the Alsace region of France. It still retains the character and the fabric built by its founding families, and adapted by families who made this community home for more than 150 years.

Alsatian-influenced vernacular dwellings hug the narrow streets, standing proud on their lots within a family of distinctly placed outbuildings — cisterns, barns and smokehouses to name a few. Homes constructed later, such as the Sears & Roebuck Queen Anne kit house built in 1911 at 509 Florence, still respect the traditional site plan indicative of an early-Texas agricultural village. Gracious lots still frame the lazy Medina River, the most desirable location for early settlers to build and still coveted property today.

Castroville is surrounded by a picturesque combination of river valley farmland and scrub brush of South Texas and the Hill Country. Seemingly isolated from the growth and development of San Antonio, Castroville is beginning to feel pressure as the metropolis expands west toward undeveloped land. With little to no control over the shape of development outside its city limits, Castroville contemplates how highway and suburban development will affect its character and attractiveness as a community. The farmland, open space and vistas of Castroville and Medina County tell the story of Castro's colonies and its evolution as equally as its historic buildings. Balancing the integrity of the land with that of the built environment will be critical if Castroville is to maintain and enhance its unique sense of place.

Castroville is also realizing the impact of growth and new development within its city limits, both in its historic core and on farmland. A 600-unit single-family subdivision just south of Highway 90 and east of the historic core is on the drawing board. In the past 10 years, several homes constructed within the historic district are incompatible in scale, materials and style of the existing homes and buildings. Because of a weak preservation ordinance, the local Historic Review Board has been unable to review new construction in the historic district. As Castroville continues to become a desirable place to live outside the big city, insensitive new development degrading Castroville's unique sense of place is an imminent threat.

Castroville residents and leaders realize the importance of confronting these important issues. In the fall of 2001, community leaders approached the Texas Historical Commission (THC) to become a pilot in the agency's new Visionaries in Preservation Program. This program helps communities forge a path to capitalize on their historic buildings and environment through a community-based process (visioning) where residents and stakeholders set a course for the future of their community. The outcome of visioning is a community-driven direction for preservation and the publication of a historic preservation plan. Castroville was selected as one of the pilots for this program, and work commenced in August of 2001.

“Growth is inevitable and desirable, but destruction of community character is not. The question is not whether your part of the world is going to change. The question is how.”

— Edward T. McMahon,
The Conservation Fund



Texas Historical Commission subject marker in Houston Square



Residents of Castroville participating in the Vision Map exercise at the community visioning workshop

The resulting plan is the cumulative work of four taskforces composed of 50 residents and community leaders, a six-person leadership committee, a visioning workshop attended by more than 60 residents, a planning team of eight THC staff, Texas Parks and Wildlife staff and a professional architect who was raised in Castroville.

Purpose

Historic preservation is a demanding endeavor — a priority that a community must set for itself and consistently address. If successful, it will be an on-going accomplishment that yields great returns and rewards. For communities with a solid foundation of historic fabric, preservation can serve as an economic generator, the impetus for tourism, the draw for new residents and the basis for an excellent quality of life.

The opportunity for a community to come together and positively explore how it can preserve and enhance its historic environment is rare. Preservation policy is often formulated in battle or controversy — the outcome of a demolished treasured building or the uphill efforts of a few convincing the powers that be.

The visioning process that has resulted in this preservation plan was an open forum for residents, leaders, government, community organizations, schools and even children, to express their concerns, practical strategies and dreams regarding Castroville. But most important, the purpose of the process was to create a dialogue about what preservation means to the community, and cooperatively establish a vision and a plan of action. Often, the “process” is more important than the “product.”

This plan should not be mistaken for a comprehensive preservation plan. While containing similar elements, this plan avoids being overly technical, does not fully develop the historic context of the city, does not define in-depth architectural styles, nor fully analyze the historic resource inventory. This action plan provides the basis from which a comprehensive preservation plan can be developed.

This document articulates Castroville’s vision and outlines a course of action for historic preservation for the next 10 years. It is a guide for using preservation to improve the community and involve a broad base of residents in making decisions and implementing change. This plan serves as a tool to:

- Incorporate preservation into the economic development strategies of the community.
- Manage growth and development both inside and outside of Castroville.
- Inform and educate that preservation is a quality of life/economic development issue.
- Involve more residents in efforts to preserve Castroville’s historic fabric.
- Stimulate decision-makers, property owners, community groups and the public to become partners in improving the city.
- Provide a framework for measuring progress toward goals and allow for flexibility in updating and revising the plan.



Process

Castroville's participation in the program began in August of 2001 with an informational meeting lead by the THC. Representatives of preservation organizations, as well as Castroville's government, chamber of commerce, Businessmen's Alliance and local businesses, attended and voiced their support for Castroville's participation in the program. Attendees elected a local leadership committee to guide the process.

The leadership committee formally met in September, brainstormed critical preservation issues, developed four taskforces to explore these issues and recruited members to serve on these workgroups. Castroville's taskforces included: Historic Resources, Preservation Infrastructure, Heritage and Culture, and Forces Affecting Change.

In mid-October, the taskforce members assembled for a training session lead by the THC. Volunteers learned about the visioning process, further brainstormed on critical issues and initiated a three-month work plan to research preservation activities in Castroville. Taskforces regularly met independently and with the THC, completed a rigorous work plan and profile of preservation in the city, and prioritized key issues and strategies. In January of 2002, Visionaries staff met with the taskforces and facilitated a session on the each group's work to date and their findings.

On February 4, a planning team composed of THC staff in the National Register Program, Museum Services and Heritage Tourism, as well as a landscape architect from Texas Parks and Wildlife and an architectural design consultant, worked with the taskforces on prioritizing key issues to develop goals and strategies. Planning team members met one-on-one with community leaders to identify strategies on specific topics such as collections, developing a museum, evaluating the city's National Register district, urban design enhancements and survey and inventory. This visit distilled and prioritized the ideas of the taskforces in preparation for a community-wide visioning workshop.

The visioning workshop, held the evening of March 22, 2002 was an open forum for residents to explore how Castroville wants to grow, what it wants to preserve and protect and what values will guide residents' efforts in shaping Castroville's future. More than 60 residents attended the workshop, which introduced the community to the work of the taskforces through the Issue Exploration Station and encouraged participants to comment on the results. In addition, participants worked through three interactive sessions — a visual preference survey, a vision map and future statements. Participants had 20 minutes to complete each exercise.

The following morning, March 23, the leadership committee and taskforces reconvened to examine the results of the workshop. With affirmation from the public on their work to date, THC staff facilitated this group in developing and prioritizing goals for preservation and brainstorming desired actions to achieve these goals.

Visionaries staff took the research and profile developed by the taskforces, integrated their own research on the community, included the feedback from



Castroville city council member David Stuart examining images at the visioning workshop



Staff from the THC facilitating the action plan meeting



the public and refined the developed goals and actions to produce a draft plan. The draft plan was sent to the leadership committee and taskforces for review and feedback, revised accordingly and presented to the community in an open public forum in August, 2002.

Agendas and minutes from all of the above meetings and workshops, in addition to a full analysis of the community visioning workshop, can be found in the appendix.



PRESERVATION PROFILE

Community Context

Castroville is a small rural town of 6.312 square kilometers and a population of 2,664. Located in Medina County at the intersection of U.S. 90 and the Medina River, it is surrounded by large family farms and ranches. Hondo, the county seat, is 14 miles to the west. San Antonio is the closest incorporated city with a city limit only five miles to the east.

Historic Castroville lies between a low upland and a large bend in the Medina River. The river's narrow valley is developed in large cultivated plots with some remaining patches of woodlands along the riverbank. The rocky uplands are oak and South Texas scrub brush woodlands, more suitable for grazing and game management.

Historic Context

Pre-European Settlement

The Medina County area has been the site of human habitation for thousands of years. Archeologists believe ancestors of either Coahuiltecan or Tonkawa Indians occupied the area continuously for several thousand years before the arrival of the first Europeans.

Spanish Exploration

The desire to claim new lands north of the Rio Grande led to continuous Spanish expeditions through present-day Texas during the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

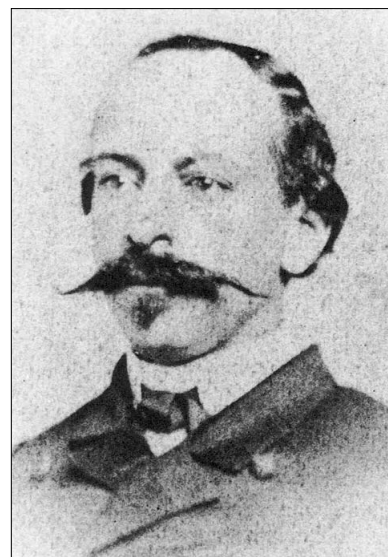
Colonization

Throughout the 18th century and into the 19th century, Lipan Apaches and Comanches frequented the area. The government of the Republic of Texas, which gained control of the area in 1836, believed settlement of the present Medina County area was essential for protection against Indian invasions from the west that might threaten San Antonio.

In 1842, the 6th Congress of Texas passed an amendment to the 1841 Peters Colony Bill, empowering the president to make empresario contracts.¹ The government hoped this would facilitate European emigration and settlement of the country.

Henri Castro

Henri Castro, a Jew of Portuguese decent, was born July 17, 1786, in Bayonne, France. Following the fall of Napoleon, Castro immigrated to the United States and became a naturalized citizen in 1827. That same year, the King of Naples appointed him Consul at Providence, Rhode Island; however, he returned to France in 1838 to become a partner in the banking house of Lafitte and Company.² While there, Castro came to Texas to investigate the feasibility of a loan to the new republic. During this visit, he became



From: *Castro's Colony: Empresario Development in Texas 1842-1865*

Henri Castro about the time of the start of his colonization project

¹ Bobby D. Weaver, *Castro's Colony: Empresario Development in Texas, 1842-1865* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985), 15.

² Ibid, 13.



acquainted with several prominent Texans, including Gen. James Hamilton and President Sam Houston. In 1842, Houston appointed Castro the Consul General for Texas at Paris, but the French government did not recognize this appointment.³

On February 12, 1842, Henri Castro, along with Jean Jassaud, also an agent of Lafitte and Company, signed a contract with President Sam Houston to settle a colony in Southwest Texas.⁴ The terms of the contract required Castro to introduce “600 families or single men over the age of seventeen years, within three years from the date of this contract...” one-third of whom must be settled within one year from the date of the contract.⁵ If the settlement time frames were not met, Castro would forfeit the land. The contract allowed the president to grant an extension for the introduction of the first colonists.

Castro's Colony

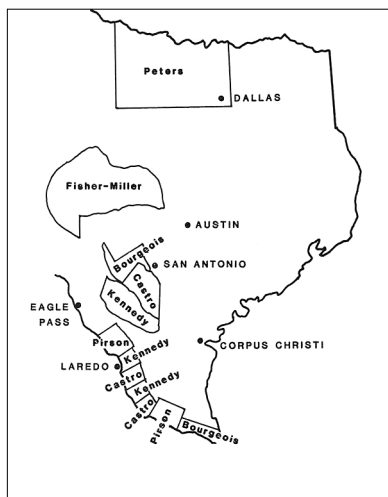
Castro's land grants covered several thousand square miles. The first reached from the Laredo crossing of the Frio River, along the ridge between the Frio and Medina rivers to a point 20 miles above the Upper Presidio del Rio Grande Road, to the confluence of the Arroyo de Uvalde and the Frio and back to the Laredo crossing.⁶ Castro would eventually purchase additional property adjoining this grant from private individuals. His second grant bordered the Rio Grande.

Settlers who came to Texas under colonial contracts received land grants depending on marital status — unmarried persons received 320 acres, and heads of families received 640 acres.⁷ Castro's contract called for him to provide full title to the colonists “whenever they shall have built a good and comfortable cabin upon it, and shall keep in cultivation and under good fence at least fifteen acres...”⁸ The empresario would receive 10 sections of land for every 100 single men over age 17. He could also grant land for “the erection of buildings for religious public worship.”⁹ As an incentive for immigrants to settle on his land grant, Castro provided a 40-acre parcel outside of town and a one-third acre lot in town, in addition to the parcels provided for in the land grant contract.¹⁰

The First Settlers

When Henri Castro began recruiting colonists in 1842, he had in mind farmers who could cultivate and settle the Texas frontier. He began his recruitment in France; however, the French government was not supportive of his efforts.

From: Castro's Colony: Empresario Development in Texas 1842–1865



**Empresario Land Grants:
1841–1842**

³ August Santleben, *A Texas Pioneer*. (New York, NY: Neale Publishing Company, 1910), 241.

⁴ Ibid, 16.

⁵ Sister Mary Generosa Callahan, C.D.P. *The History of the Sisters of Divine Providence* (San Antonio: Catholic Life Publications, 1955), 59-60.

⁶ Weaver, 16.

⁷ Texas State Historical Association. *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. 2 (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1952), 20.

⁸ Sister Callahan, C.D.P., *History of the Sisters*, 59-60.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Weaver, *Castro's Colony*, 47.



Castro found more success and fewer government restraints among the farmers in the eastern French providences of Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin, known as Alsace. The majority of these farmers rented rather than owned their land and saw the chance to immigrate to Texas as a way out of their deteriorating financial condition.¹¹ Castro also recruited from the Rhenish provinces of Germany and Switzerland surrounding Alsace.

Even though Castro wanted farmer colonists and recruited from farming areas, the first Castro settlers were mostly non-farmers. As late as 1850, only 40 percent of the households in Castro's colony referred to themselves as farmers.¹²

Seven ships left Europe between November 1842 and July 1844 with 700 Castro colonists. They landed in Galveston and then traveled to San Antonio. The earliest wave of settlers suffered many hardships and waited more than a year for Castro to return to Texas from Europe to take them to their land grants. By the time Castro arrived and was ready to leave San Antonio for what would become Castroville, only 27 colonists were willing to travel with him.¹³

Castro's colonists, along with 12 Mexican cart drivers, left San Antonio on the afternoon of September 1, 1844, arriving at a horseshoe bend of the Medina River on September 4. On September 12, the site was officially designated as Castroville.¹⁴

Early Castroville

Generally, the first settlers of Castroville came from small communities where land for farming and the tending of cattle remained separate from the community.¹⁵ Castroville follows the layout of most European villages with which the first settlers were familiar. It is laid out as a grid, complete with a central square, generous streets of 15 varas (approximately 41 feet) in width and individual farming plots surrounding the town.¹⁶

John James, deputy surveyor of Bexar County, surveyed the town with 111 square blocks. Primary streets, named for capitals of Europe, ran east and west, and secondary streets, named for Castro's relatives and friends, ran north and south. The plan created four triangular blocks where the grid intersects what are now Alamo and San Jacinto streets, following the bend of the river. Twenty-five larger, irregular-shaped blocks bordering the river were highly favored by the settlers. Early Castroville resembled a crescent with homes scattered along the river.

In February 1847, the *Galveston News* wrote of Castroville:

...it combines all the advantages that could be wished for...The population two years after the founding...consists of 700 inhabitants, who live in 76 houses. Thirty-four houses are being built.



Map of Alsace

¹¹ Ibid, 93.

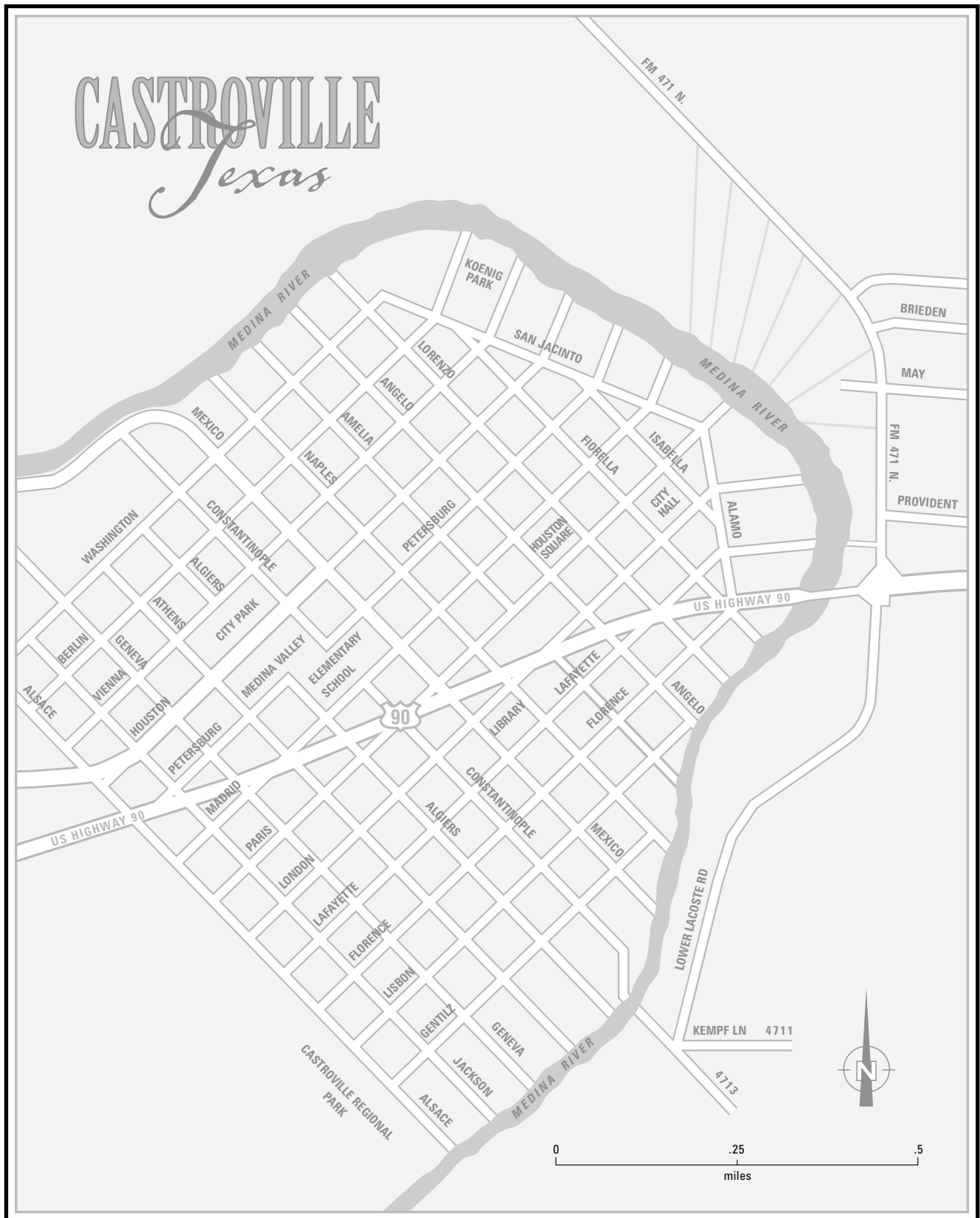
¹² Ibid, 90.

¹³ Ibid, 50.

¹⁴ Santleben, *A Texas Pioneer*, 236.

¹⁵ Tony Crosby, paper read at the Texas State Historical Association Annual Meeting, March 1975. Castroville Historic District National Register file, Texas Historical Commission.

¹⁶ Texas State Historical Association. *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. 1 (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1952), 309. A vara equals approximately 33.3 inches.





Five hundred acres are under cultivation, planted mostly with corn.

There are four stores stocked with dry goods, groceries, household furniture, farming implements and tools. Mechanics and craftsmen of all kinds are among the settlers....¹⁷

In January 1848, residents presented a petition to the Texas Legislature for the creation of Medina County. The legislature approved the petition, and Medina County was created on February 12, 1848, with Castroville as the county seat.¹⁸

Once a trace used by Native Americans to travel between villages, U.S. Highway 90 illustrates the stages of change in Castroville. The town's business activity and growth would reflect travel along the route for the next century. Demand for teamsters, wagons and food supplies to stock the forts on the route drove the early economy. By 1857, settlers had built a dam, gristmill, sawmill and brewery near the river crossing.

"...It Is Now a Decided Success."¹⁹

Travelers to and from San Antonio quickly identified Castroville as a highly desirable way station. In December 1853, brothers Frederick Law Olmstead and John Hull Olmstead set out on a saddle trip of the South. The purpose was to contribute a series of letters to the *New York Daily Times* on the Southern slaveholding states. While in Texas, the brothers visited the central, southern and southeastern portions of the state, including Castroville.

Olmstead wrote in his memoirs:

Perhaps the most remarkable thing is the hotel, by M. Tarde... the best inn we saw in the state. How delighted and astonished many a traveler must have been, on arriving...to find napkins, silver forks and radishes, French servants, French neatness, French furniture, delicious French beds....²⁰

Wagon trains to Mexico sustained the town during the Civil War when the U.S. Army abandoned its forts. The European settlers of the area sympathized with the Union during the war, and in February 1861, Medina County became one of a handful of Texas counties to vote against secession. The vote was 207 to 140.²¹

Despite the turmoil of the time, westward travel and the commercial trade route to Mexico kept Castroville's economy strong. Later, the expansion of the railroad west from San Antonio would set the stage for a cycle of change for the town.



Tarde Hotel, 1936

From: Historic American Building Survey



Old Mill

¹⁷ Viktor Bracht, *Texas in 1848* (Manchaca, TX: German-Texan Heritage Society, 1991), 101.

¹⁸ The Castro Colonies Heritage Association, Inc., *The History of Medina County, Texas* (Dallas: National Sharegraphics, Inc., 1983), 5.

¹⁹ Frederick L. Olmsted, *A Journey through Texas: Or, a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier* (New York: Dix, Edwards, 1857; repr., Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1978), 278.

²⁰ Ibid, 277.

²¹ Castro Colonies, *History of Medina*, 9.



A Gradual Decline

Castroville passed up opportunities for railroad expansion through the town in 1880 and 1881. Company officials eventually established the line south of town. The rapid commercial and population growth in railroad towns would cause a gradual decline of business and population in Castroville.

By 1884, Castroville's population had again increased and it broke the 1,000 mark. The town boasted a steam-powered gristmill, a cotton gin, a brewery, churches, a weekly newspaper and a public school. The mother-house of the Catholic order of the Sisters of Divine Providence was also well established in Castroville by this time. The town built a waterworks in 1890 and later installed a telephone system. The railroad, however, continued to draw traffic from the west road and commercial vitality from the town.

The lack of railroad transportation to Castroville caused Medina County officials to move the seat of government to Hondo in 1892; subsequently, Castroville citizens voted to abolish the town government.²² The mother-house of the convent also left Castroville three years later, moving to San Antonio to be more accessible to the railroad. It would take 70 years for Castroville to reach a population of 1,000 again.

By 1925, Castroville received electricity when the mill was converted for hydroelectric generation. The ensuing depression, however, slowed Castroville's economy. With the opening of the Hondo Air Base and road construction in the 1940s came a brief wave of growth.

Following World War II, the city paved its streets for the first time.²³ A concern for adequate water and electrical systems led to the re-incorporation of the town in 1947, but Castroville grew slowly, with less than one percent annual growth.²⁴ This trend continued well into the 1950s.

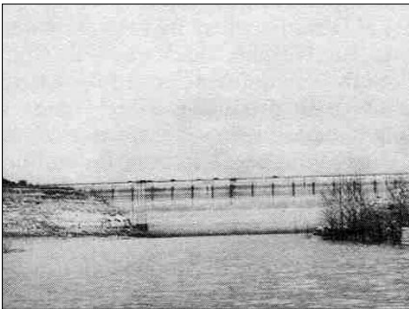
Medina Dam and Canal

When Henri Castro entered the Medina Valley in 1844, he recognized the potential of the floodwaters in the canyons to irrigate the land. It would take more than 60 years for this potential to be realized.

In 1911, Dr. Fred Stark Pearson, with the persistence of Alex Walton, Jr., began constructing a dam on the Medina River 14 miles upstream of Castroville. They completed the work in 1912, but the water rose slowly, taking until 1915 to accumulate a useable amount.

The largest dam in Texas and the fourth largest in the country, it took more than 3,000 men to build, cost \$1,550,750 and provided water to irrigate an estimated 60,000 acres.²⁵ The dam received an Official Texas Historical Marker in 1978. Soon after construction began, the dam became a tourist

From: *The History of Medina County, Texas*



Medina Dam, 1948

²² Ibid, 65, 66.

²³ Castro Colonies, *History of Medina*, 66.

²⁴ Computed from U.S. Census figures.

²⁵ S. M. Kuehe and Rev. Cyril Mathew, *Ripples From Medina Lake* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1999), preface.



destination. Tour groups organized sightseeing trips in Packard automobiles at a cost of \$3.50 for a roundtrip tour.²⁶

An extensive canal system delivers water to 34,000 acres of blackland prairie farmlands below the Balcones escarpment around Castroville. At the time it was constructed, it was the biggest irrigation project west of the Mississippi.²⁷ The irrigation water provided by the dam and canal system allowed for increased vegetable production. This, in turn, brought prosperity to Castroville and the Medina Valley. Soon, a cannery (the largest in Texas) opened near the dam and the area received electricity, natural gas and a public water supply system.²⁸ Medina Lake continues to be a popular water recreation area. Bexar-Medina-Atascosa Counties Water Control and Improvement District 1 (often referred to as the BMA) owns and operates Medina Lake and holds the easement on the Canal.

The San Antonio/El Paso Road (Woll's Road)

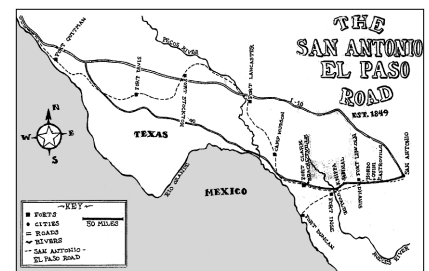
The Old San Antonio Road, formally established in 1691, was a major artery into Texas. Originally a trace used by Native Americans to travel between villages, the Old San Antonio Road linked Coahuila, Mexico, with Los Adaes (near present-day Robelene, Louisiana), the first Spanish capital of the province of Texas. Later, the road connected the Texas frontier to Saltillo, Mexico and Mexico City.²⁹ The Old San Antonio Road was a major westward route for Anglo-American immigrants to Texas, as well as a vital military highway for Texans and Mexicans. It served Fort Inge (Camp Leona) in Uvalde and the string of forts established to protect the new frontier. It extended to El Paso and Santa Fe, New Mexico, and ended in San Diego, California, becoming one of the main southern routes to the gold fields in the Sierra Nevada in the 1840s and 1850s.

The San Antonio to El Paso Road, also known as Woll's Road, is a segment of the Old San Antonio Road that runs along U.S. Highway 90 through Castroville. Woll's Road originally served as a route from San Antonio and the Rio Grande to the Spanish mission of San Lorenzo de la Cruz in what is now Edwards County.³⁰

The road gained its later name from Mexican Gen. Adrian Woll, who used the route during his attack on San Antonio in 1842. Brig. Gen. John E. Wool also used it to invade Mexico during the Mexican War. In addition to its military use, Woll's Road was a vital route of commerce.³¹ Residents of towns along the route found employment as freighters and used the road to export cotton to Mexico during the Civil War.



Overlooking the Medina Canal in Castroville



The San Antonio/El Paso Road in the Castroville Area Visitor Guide

²⁶ Ibid, 31.

²⁷ <http://www.edwardsaquifer.net/medina.html>. Medina Lake and Canal System. The Edwards Aquifer homepage by Gregg A. Eckhardt.

²⁸ Castro Colonies, *History of Medina*, 21.

²⁹ Camino Real para los Texas National Historic Trail Feasibility Study Newsletter, www.nps.gov/planning/elcatx/

³⁰ A. Joachim McGraw, John W. Clark Jr. and Elizabeth A. Robbins, *A Texas Legacy: The Old San Antonio Road and the Caminos Reales* (Austin: Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation, 1991) 229.

³¹ Ibid.



State Highway 3 through Castroville began along the path of the San Antonio to El Paso road in 1922. This branch of the national highway system was promoted as the Old Spanish Trail and completed in 1929. Improvements to the road came in 1938, when it became U.S. Highway 90, now the major thoroughfare through Castroville.



Alsatian Dancers

Cultural Heritage

The Alsatian community dominates the heritage of Castroville, while Hispanic culture is increasing in importance. Numerous clubs and activities focus on the Alsatian heritage with events and programs.

Alsatian Heritage

The Alsatian language is an unwritten Germanic dialect and is quickly disappearing from the Alsace region. As spoken in Castroville, it has changed very little since the first immigrants settled there. Some residents, in an effort to maintain the Castroville Alsatian language, published an Alsatian dictionary. They also formed a club in 1995 to promote the use of the Alsatian language through monthly meetings where attendees gather to converse in the native dialect.

Begun in 1980 when a musician and instructor from Strasbourg in Alsace visited Castroville, the Alsatian Dancers marked their 20th anniversary in 2000. The Alsatian dance group continues to be a viable reflection of the Alsatian culture in Castroville through dance and costume. The group performs at festivals throughout Texas and the U.S., most notably at the annual Texas Folklife Festival in San Antonio and at the rededication of the Statue of Liberty in 1986. This effort to maintain the Alsatian culture is a significant statement of pride and commitment by the community.

Cultural Artifacts

Heirs of founding families retain numerous artifacts of early settlement. Although much research and documentation on the Castro colonies and its founders has been compiled, no systematic program exists to collect, inventory, conserve and display this material.



First St. Louis Catholic Church

Religious Heritage

Religion has been in the forefront of Castroville's history. Castro's original land grant contract specifically allowed for the allocation of land for religious buildings. Today, Castroville has several churches of different denominations, but the primary denominations in early Castroville were Catholic and Lutheran.

The Catholic Church

Early settlers laid the cornerstone of St. Louis Catholic Church, under the patronage of Louis IX of France, within a week of their arrival in 1844.³² Two other St. Louis Catholic churches were built since then, and the present church dates from 1870.³³

³² Julia Nott Waugh, *Castro-Ville and Henry Castro Empresario* (Julia Nott Waugh, 1934, reprint 1986), 21.

³³ Texas Historical Commission, "St. Louis Church," Texas Historical Marker file.



In 1868, the Sisters of Divine Providence established their motherhouse in Castroville as the only branch house of Saint Jean-de-Bassel outside of Europe.³⁴ After the motherhouse moved to San Antonio, the convent building served as a vocational housekeeping school for girls, a seminary for ecclesiastical students from Mexico and a boys' military school.³⁵ The building, still owned by the Sisters of Divine Providence, is now a conference and retreat center.

The Lutheran Church

Zion Lutheran Church organized in 1852 to serve the mostly German Lutheran population of Castroville.³⁶ The first Lutheran church was built in 1853. Later, a parsonage was added. This church is believed to be the first Lutheran Church in Texas built of stone.³⁷ The second and present church, built on the same site, dates from 1939.³⁸

Feast Days

First celebrated as early as 1847, the feast day of St. Louis is observed in Castroville every year on the Sunday closest to the actual feast day of August 25. Originally a two-day celebration with picnics and dances, St. Louis Day is now a one-day event, which begins with mass and is followed by a parade, musical entertainment, a carnival and a barbecue of Alsatian sausage. The festival attracts visitors from all over the U.S., as well as other countries.

All Saints' and All Souls' days, primarily Catholic feast days, are held November 1st and 2nd to commemorate the dead. Many residents and visitors attend the graves of their loved ones and leave flowers as a remembrance. In recent times, luminaries (a Mexican influence) have also been placed at the gravesites.

Cross Hill

Also called Gentilz Hill, Cross Hill is one of the most prominent landmarks in Castroville. Residents first placed a cross on the hill in 1849. In the past, members of the Catholic faith would climb the hill during Rogation Days and Lent to pray.³⁹ Today, visitors to the hill have a panoramic view of Castroville and the Medina Valley.

Cemeteries

Castroville has several historic cemeteries, both public and private. Many graves in Castroville are more than 100 years old. The markers in these cemeteries reflect the diverse cultures present in the area; markers bear inscriptions in German, English, French and Spanish. There are also many single graves within the incorporated limits that may or may not be marked.



St. Louis Day Celebration

³⁴ Sister Callahan, C.D., *History of the Sisters*, 117, 129.

³⁵ Ibid, 187, 231, 271.

³⁶ 150th Anniversary Committee, *Zion Lutheran Church 150 Years* (2002)

³⁷ Castro Colonies, *History of Medina*, 71.

³⁸ 150th Anniversary, *Zion Lutheran Church*, 2002.

³⁹ Castro Colonies, *History of Medina*, 73.



St. Louis Cemetery

The St. Louis Catholic Cemetery has been used since Castroville's founding in 1844. The oldest existing tombstone dates from 1849. The cemetery is the burial place of Henri Castro's wife, Amelia. (Henri Castro died in Mexico and is buried there). In 1980, the Texas Historical Commission placed an Official Texas Historical Marker at the St. Louis Cemetery.

In 1968, several unmarked burials were found outside the Catholic Cemetery walls. These were presumed to be unsanctified burials for ex-communicated members or suicides — both excluded from the cemetery in the early days by the church.⁴⁰

The Zion Lutheran Cemetery consists of two cemeteries, referred to as the new and the old. Henri Castro gave the land for the Lutheran Cemetery, as well as the Catholic Cemetery, in 1846. The first recorded burial in the old Lutheran cemetery dates from 1853.

Several small, private cemeteries exist in Castroville. One is the Ihnken Family Cemetery, created when Marie Becker Ihnken died in 1847. Located on private land across from the Regional Park, the cemetery received an Official Texas Historical Marker in 1998. A small family cemetery also stands within the Castroville Regional Park. While deteriorated, the cemetery still retains readable headstones and its original perimeter stone walls.

⁴⁰ Connie Rihn, "St. Louis Catholic Cemetery" (Texas Historical Commission marker file: St. Louis Catholic Cemetery), 5.



ANALYSIS OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

Cultural Landscapes, Farmland and Scenic Vistas

The study and application of cultural landscapes within the preservation movement has become an important, yet elusive development within the field. Often hard to define, and therefore difficult to plan for and manage, cultural landscapes allow us to see, interpret and experience landscapes that emphasize the interaction between human beings and nature over time.⁴¹ The preservation and promotion of cultural landscapes is a progressive and powerful tool for communities interested in developing heritage and cultural tourism at a more sophisticated level.

Castroville is surrounded to the north and east by the fertile agricultural land of the Medina Valley, which served as the large 40-acre parcels for cultivation outside of the original settlement. While outside the Castroville city limits, the relationship of this land to the city's culture and heritage is outstanding. Vernacular Alsatian homes, barns and outbuildings, many dating to the 1850s and owned by founding families, remain in their original setting. This geography constitutes a significant cultural landscape that is paradoxically threatened by development and demolition by neglect. Many historic Alsatian buildings are abandoned and in various states of decay. Meanwhile several parcels of land have sold (or are on the market) and developed into small subdivisions. The American Farmland Trust considers this open agrarian landscape adjacent to Castroville some of the most endangered property in the state.

The open landscape and farmland along U.S. 90 entering Castroville from the east is the most noticeable threatened landscape to residents in city. Hundreds of acres of agricultural land have recently been sold along the highway and plans are under way for a 600-unit single-family subdivision and a large car dealership. These projects are only the beginning of what could be significant automobile-oriented development along the highway between San Antonio and Castroville.

The Medina Canal is a cultural landscape running through the Castroville Regional Park that has excellent potential for preservation and interpretation. At the time of construction in 1912, it was the largest irrigation project west of the Mississippi River. Today it stands testament to the influence of engineering and irrigation on the agricultural landscape of the Medina Valley and beyond. Managed by the BMA today, Castroville must take the lead to create an opportunity for turning this rare historic landscape into a resource for nature, recreation and heritage tourism.

The community also identifies the scenic vista of the Medina Valley as a significant and endangered viewshed.⁴² Approaching Castroville from the



Endangered cultural landscapes of Medina County



Alsatian house adjacent to a new subdivision off 471 in Medina county



Indication of intensive commercial development along Highway 90 at the east entrance to Castroville

⁴¹ From the web site of the Institute for Cultural Landscape Studies of the Arnold Arboretum (<http://www.icls.harvard.edu>), © The President and Fellows of Harvard College.

⁴² Viewshed is a recently coined term used to indicate the entire area an individual can see from a given point.



north on 471 through the Medina Valley, the agricultural viewshed is stunning. Likewise, several view corridors along this approach, as well as from the west on U.S. 90, lead the visitor to Castroville's tallest landmark – the spire of St. Louis Cathedral.

Several scenic roads in Castroville retain a strong sense of past function and heritage. The river road runs north from Mexico Street, and the Lower Lacoste Road runs south via the low-water crossing on Constantinople Street. Both routes offer scenic drives with strong historic character from town out into the countryside.

Urban Form and Historic Development Patterns

Henri Castro's original town grid constitutes the majority of Castroville's developed area. Only a few small additions do not adhere to the grid pattern. The western village boundaries are clear, with the irrigation canal, cemeteries, the rise to the upland plateau and the cross on Mount Gentilz remaining intact. Sadly, the definition of the historic eastern edge suffers, with the river crossing visually lost in a strip of commercial outlets, traffic and an unremarkable bridge.

Town streets are narrow, with no curbs or gutters, lending both an intimate feel and a pedestrian-friendly design. Only the state and federal highways and newly built additions allow fast traffic and broad turning radiuses. Even commercial streets off U.S. 90 reflect the pace and character of pre-depression era travel. Aside from the river crossing, State Highway 3 (Woll's Road) is intact. Several of Castroville's early commercial buildings still identify it as the main historic commercial route through town (what is now the first several blocks of Fiorella north of U.S. 90), though most of the city's commercial activity has been diverted to U.S. 90. This route also includes a remnant paralleling its replacement east of the river.



**Looking to Houston Square
from Paris**

The old market square remains relatively intact, but it lacks the degree of activity once seen as the community's central meeting and commercial area. Social and commercial interaction has shifted to establishments along U.S. 90. A bank, butcher store, art gallery and two churches use the square for parking and generate most of the visits. The square also plays host to several markets and festivals throughout the year. A second square, September Square, located at the gateway corner of U.S. 90 and Fiorella, is a landscaped park with several monuments to Henri Castro and war veterans.

Residential density in the historic area is relatively low, and many lots retain side yards and adjacent plots. Building footprints are small, with numerous outbuildings creating a sense of openness on residential streets. Primary structures are historically placed close to the street with minimal setbacks. Owners tend to "mark the line" with different types of low fences, rows of street trees and various plantings defining their property. Outbuildings often extend this boundary, creating open yards to the interior or side of the lot and defining a private but still visually open space. Most buildings are small and low structures. This, along with street width, creates site design factors and retention of tree cover, the development pattern typical of the historic district.



Historic Structures

Castroville's recent survey of historic resources, conducted in 2000/2001, identified 446 historic properties within the city limits, of which one-half are from the 19th century.⁴³ Half of these resources range from medium significance to landmark priority. The majority of historic structures are residential/domestic and outbuildings, with those of the early Alsatian settlers being the most prevalent and significant of a wide range of periods and styles. The historic structures are generally well maintained, although there are concerns about the neglect and deterioration of some structures that contribute to the historic district. There are also concerns about the accuracy of some restorations.

While the Alsatian vernacular housing type is the most pervasive and significant historic resource type, Castroville has a rich collection of other housing and building types that illuminate the development of the town and should be carefully preserved. Bungalows, a type of home popularized in the early decades of the 20th century, constitute 22 percent of residential buildings in the city. Queen Anne influenced L-plans, pyramidal cottages, Sears & Roebuck Catalog homes, Classical Revival, Tudor Revival and Craftsman homes represent the popularity of other housing styles, both high style and vernacular, that made their way to Castroville throughout the course of its development.

Castroville has a smaller, but important percentage of other structure types — commercial, institutional (including religious, educational, governmental, fraternal and funerary) and industrial. Several Alsatian one- and two-part commercial block buildings concentrated along Fiorella and leading to the square on Paris are gems in the city. A few of the city's institutional landmarks consist of the first St. Louis Church (1840), the second St. Louis Church (1870), the Moye Center (1873), St. Louis School (1925), the old county courthouse (1878), the fraternal lodge (c. 1935) and the collection of cemeteries along Jackson Street.

The Landmark Inn is probably Castroville's most well-known landmark and commercial/industrial complex. It is now operating as a bed and breakfast and owned and managed by Texas Parks & Wildlife. The complex, which evolved from humble beginnings as a one-story general store and home with detached kitchen in 1849, to a collection of structures including a residence, a washhouse, a grist mill, and a two-story store and hotel.

Out of 446 identified structures in the survey, 114 were outbuildings. 30 percent of these structures were marked as high and medium priority. The outbuildings of the community — barns, sheds, wells and cisterns, to name a few — are significant in their configuration and definition of property. As a collective, the outbuildings speak to the manner in which the settlers used their property, and how they arranged structures on large lots to reflect the agricultural communities from which they came. Castroville's unique char-



The Arcadius Steinle House on Fiorella, built in 1847



The A. H. Tondre House, a Sears & Roebuck house on Florence



The Ihnken House on Gentilz



Formerly the Vance Hotel and now the Landmark Inn run by Texas Parks and Wildlife

⁴³ City of Castroville, "Historic Resources Survey Report for the City of Castroville, Texas," 2002, 15.



**Typical backyard with arrangement
of many accessory buildings**

acter and sense of place is in large part due to the quantity and configuration of outbuildings. It is imperative that these outbuildings are perceived and treated with similar preservation standards as the landmark homes of the city.

For more information on the historic structure types and styles, please consult the survey report available at city hall and the public library.



THE PRESERVATION MOVEMENT & COMMUNITY

History

Castroville was at the forefront of activity in the early years of the preservation movement in Texas. There has always been a keen interest, especially from outsiders, in the history and architecture of Castroville. Dave Williams, who became the director of the National Youth Administration, photographed buildings in Castroville during the 1920s and again in 1940. In its first year, the Historic American Building Survey, a program of the New Deal, elected to document 18 properties in Castroville, four with measured drawings.

Preservation activity flourished in Castroville in the 1960s and 1970s. The Texas Historical Commission conducted a survey of historic resources in 1969, and a substantial district, one of the first three in Texas, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970. All of the Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks were listed in these decades. In addition, Texas Parks and Wildlife established a State Historic Site for the Landmark Inn in 1974. The City of Castroville also recognized the importance of protecting the historic resources of the city, and in 1975 passed a historic preservation ordinance with a large district (closely matching the National Register district boundaries).

As seen through letters to the THC during the 1970s, regional and national organizations took note of Castroville. Although these projects never came to fruition, the Alamo Area Council of Governments selected Castroville as a pilot project to plan for historic preservation in light of the region's expanding urban growth and disappearance of historic assets, including developing museums, establishing tours, incorporating heritage education in the schools and promoting the historic buildings to potential buyers.⁴⁴ Letters to the THC also indicate interest from the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in including Castroville in an exhibit on regional architecture.

By 1980, enthusiasm for preservation was beginning to lessen, if not deteriorate. City Council members attempted to revoke or weaken the preservation ordinance, including a negative newspaper campaign on the historic preservation program of Castroville. This dissatisfaction with the ordinance led to a period of lax and uneven enforcement. St. Louis Church demolished the Old Parish Hall in 1980. Outside interest still remained however, as evidenced by a feature on Castroville's historic homes and culture in *Country Home* magazine in 1987.

The 1990s saw a resurgence of preservation activity that has resulted in a high level of interest today. The Castro Garden Club published a wonderful book in 1994 on the history of the town's historic buildings. A new nonprofit organization, solely dedicated to historic preservation in Castroville — the Castroville Conservation Society — was founded in 1999 and has sponsored



The 17th Century Steinbach (Alsatian) House relocated from Rouffach, France



The Steinbach House, built in 1648 in France and reassembled in Castroville in 2002

⁴⁴ The project was to be funded by a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA). The NEA does not have any information as to why it was not funded.



Designation of a "Pioneer Castroville Home" at the Landmark Inn complex



Designation of a "Special Castroville Home" indicating compatible new construction with the historic character of Castroville



Award from the San Antonio Conservation Society on the Old Standby on Fiorella, built in 1856

a successful annual candlelight tour of homes. The City of Castroville was designated as a Certified Local Government (CLG) in 1999 as well. The Castroville Historic Review Board has taken an active role to educate Castroville residents through preservation workshops.

Residents of San Antonio look to Castroville as a peaceful location for a full-time or weekend home (the commute is 20 minutes or less). With this interest has come a wave of restorations and rehabilitations of the Alsatian homes. However, the most visible restoration project is not a historic building indigenous to Castroville. An Alsatian home, the Steinbach house (1618 to 1648), was moved from Wahlbach, France in 1998 and was reconstructed in Castroville by the Association Jardin des Racines. Faculty and students of Lycee Agricole of Rouffach, France, along with residents of Castroville, completed the work in the summer of 2001.

With the beginning of the 21st century, the energy for preservation in Castroville continues. Through a 60/40 CLG matching grant, the City of Castroville conducted a citywide survey of historic resources in 2000–02. This, coupled with participation as a pilot community in the Visionaries in Preservation Program, will give the people of Castroville a solid foundation to successfully preserve, enhance and promote the assets that make them truly unique.

Designations

The majority of designations and markers were erected in Castroville in the 1960s and 1970s. For a complete listing of properties listed on the National Register or designated as Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks, please see the appendix. Also see the appendix for definitions of each type of designation.

Federal

Castroville's heritage and historic resources have received national attention for more than 70 years. In 1933, 18 properties in Castroville were selected for documentation by the Historic American Buildings Survey, which documents significant buildings across the nation through measured drawings, photographs and written history.

In 1970, Castroville became one of the first three historic districts in Texas listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register district boundaries are roughly bounded by Medina River, SR 471, Gime, Houston and Constantinople and cover approximately 230 historic structures (see map in appendix). The Landmark Inn complex is the only individually listed property in Castroville.

State

The state of Texas designated 12 Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks in Castroville between 1962 and 2000. In addition, Texas Parks and Wildlife established a State Historic Site for the Landmark Inn in 1974. Castroville secured the Certified Local Government status from the Texas Historical Commission in August 1999 and became a pilot community in its Visionaries in Preservation Program in 2001.



Local

The city of Castroville enacted a local historic preservation ordinance, along with a historic district, in 1975. The historic district has changed on the zoning map to include three contiguous districts, two residential and one commercial, indicated with an HE and CD suffix. The boundaries of those districts, while close, do not match those of the National Register District. The local district boundaries cut through half blocks and zig-zag around individual lots, diminishing the continuity of the district. While the ordinance was intended to protect the designated district, it only had jurisdiction over properties identified in a 1969 survey completed by the Texas Historical Commission.

Recent activities of the Historic Review Board are addressing this situation, and with the help of the Visionaries and the Certified Local Government programs, efforts are under way to amend the ordinance to include design review, designations, incentives and clearer procedures to make management more effective.

Different preservation organizations have erected plaques and markers on the historic homes and buildings of Castroville, including the Pioneer Castroville Home, the Special Castroville Home and the San Antonio Conservation Society Award. A description of these different markers and designations and their meanings can be found in the appendix.

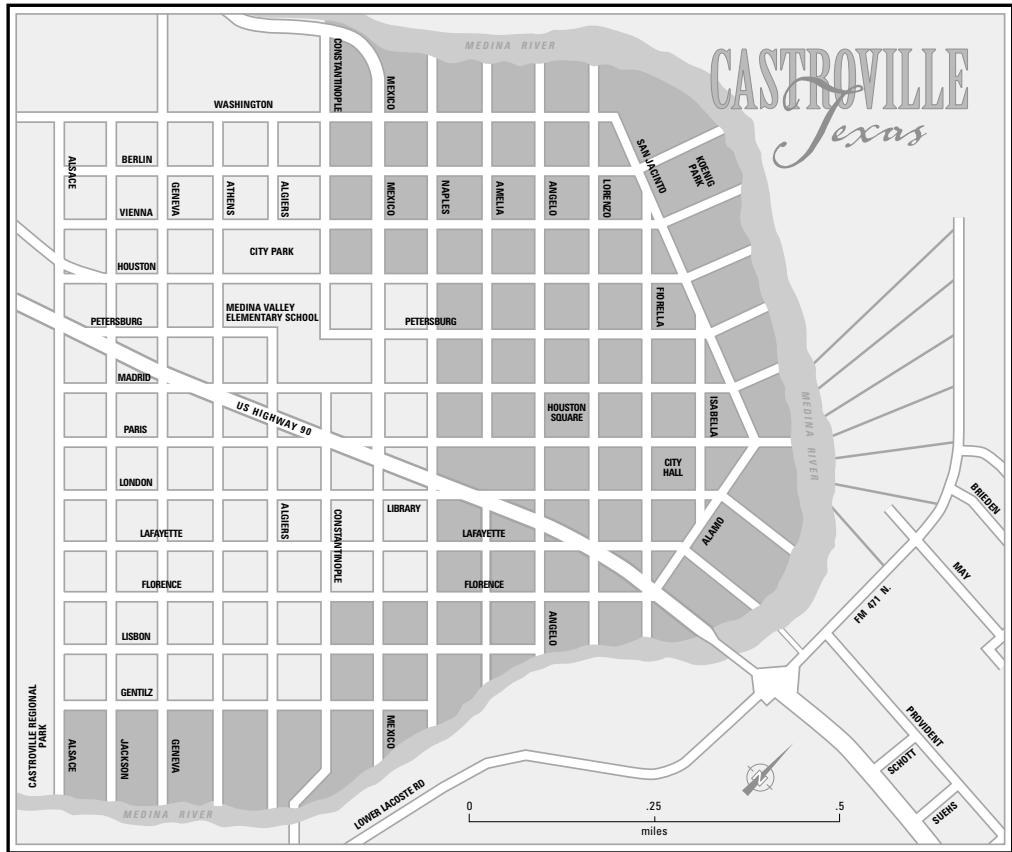
The Preservation Community in Castroville

Two entities officially oversee preservation activity in Castroville: the Medina County Historical Commission and the City of Castroville. The former has not been a major initiator of local preservation activities, but is cognizant and supportive of the efforts. Its main responsibility has been the review of state subject markers and Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks. The latter is a certified local government and has an active preservation agent in the Historic Review Board and historic preservation officer, but no professional staff assigned to preservation or planning activities.

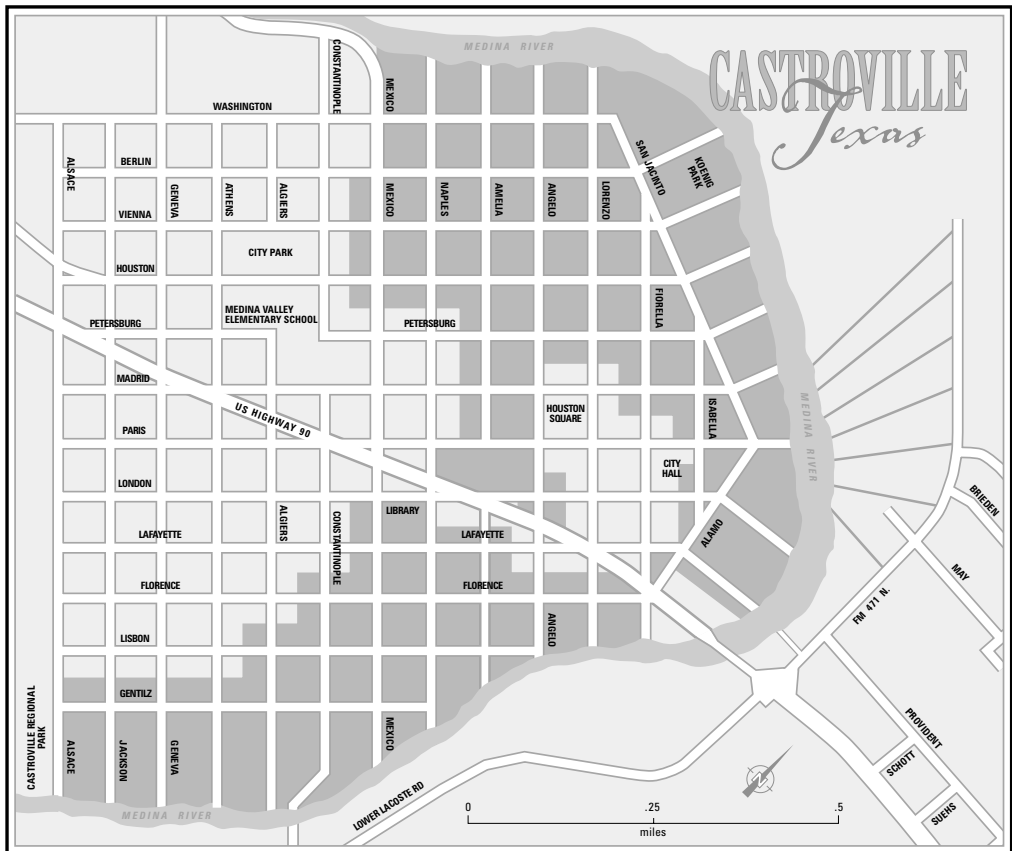
San Antonio's long-established preservation community and the San Antonio Conservation Society are active in local and area preservation activity. A new local organization, The Castroville Conservation Society, was created in 1999 to specifically focus on Castroville's heritage and resources. Other organizations such as The Castro Colonies Heritage Association, Castroville Garden Club, The Alsatian Club, St. Louis church and the Alsatian Dancers are broader interest groups that serve major roles in preservation activity. Many other organizations and groups in Castroville are active participants in preservation — please see the Appendix for a list of local, regional, statewide and national partners in preservation.



**Map of Castroville
illustrating the
National Register District
(darkest shaded area)**



**Map of Castroville
illustrating the
Local Historic Districts
(darkest shaded area)**





ISSUES

Strengthen Historic Preservation Policy

Inadequacies of the Current Ordinance

The most often-voiced concern about historic preservation in Castroville is the lack of a strong ordinance to protect the historic buildings and character of the city. All four taskforces identified this as a critical issue in establishing a successful preservation effort in Castroville. Participants in the community visioning workshop affirmed the taskforces' opinion to establish a strong, but not excessively rigid, ordinance, that will clearly guide preservation efforts and also ensure compatible new development within the historic districts. Taskforce 2, Preservation Infrastructure, developed recommendations for a revised preservation ordinance that included the following:

1. It must be mandatory for all property owners in the historic district
2. It must be clearly written, easy to read and understand
3. There must be clear and fair procedures for the Historic Review Board to review activity in the historic districts, including adequate notice for meetings and agendas
4. There must be strong preservation and design criteria for all activities in historic districts
 - a. For example, there must be clear standards for new construction to be compatible to historic fabric in materials, form, style, setbacks, etc.
5. No demolition must be enforceable
6. Clear maps delineating the boundaries of the historic district
7. Other city ordinances must be sensitive and compatible to the historic district in terms of height, lot coverage, setback, etc.
 - a. For example, the city's current zoning ordinance requires a minimum setback of 20 feet for buildings in the residential historic district, making any new construction incompatible with historic homes which typically have a setback of 10 feet or less
10. The historic preservation ordinance should provide guidelines and require Certificates of Appropriateness for move-in buildings
11. Education and communication on what it means to live in a historic district is imperative — property owners must know about the rules, regulations and standards at the outset

Castroville's current ordinance establishes two historic overlay districts, but limits the Historic Review Board's review to buildings identified on the 1969 survey. While this at least protects a limited number of pioneer Alsatian structures, it does not address the preservation of other resources types within the district, nor does it allow for any review of new construction, infill and demolition. Without review of all properties within a defined district, the character and continuity of the district is guaranteed to deteriorate.

Incompatible new construction has become an issue in Castroville, with several examples of new homes built with little regard to the style, materials,



massing, scale and site planning. If Castroville is to encourage development within its historic district, it must ensure new construction is compatible with its existing character. User-friendly design guidelines for preservation of existing historic homes and guidelines for new construction are critical.

Since the establishment of the two historic districts in the city, there has been no mechanism for a property owner, or entity of the city such as the Historic Review Board or City Council, to designate a building or area as a historic landmark. Taskforce 2 discussed instituting designation reports for districts and individual landmarks, and providing a means for property owners and others to designate new local landmarks and districts. These designation reports can be kept in an archive at the city and library and be a resource to people researching the history of homes in Castroville.

Along this same line, Castroville has a nearly complete inventory of historic resources. However it lacks in-depth information on the history of the homes and buildings. There are good records of most of the homes at the Medina County Courthouse in Hondo, and written histories of several of the homes in publications. Castroville needs to do more intensive research on the homes and write the histories for each. One incentive could be to provide a plaque for owners who research and write a report on their home. That information can be archived in the library and city hall, and also be available for future research.



Vernacular stone outbuilding with new construction in the background in Castroville's historic district

Need for Design Guidelines

A strong, enforceable and fair ordinance is key to successfully protecting the historic resources and character of an area. Design guidelines are the interface between the ordinance and the property owner, illustrating the principles of preservation and the standards that owners of historic properties should follow in their activities. Design guidelines are also a critical tool for the Historic Review Board to use in reviewing Certificates of Appropriateness. Design guidelines can be a powerful educational tool for all parties involved in activities and decisions related to the preservation and rehabilitation of historic properties.

Design guidelines should be comprehensive, educational, visual and tailored to the specific character and features of Castroville's historic district.

Incentives

Throughout the course of taskforce work and the visioning process, residents and policy makers of Castroville reiterated the importance of developing incentives for historic preservation. The community feels incentives are a positive way to encourage property owners to "do the right thing" in regarding commercial and residential structures. Some Castroville residents feel that a mandatory preservation ordinance is more palatable if incentives are a part of the equation.



Farmland along Highway 90 approaching Castroville from the east

Destruction of Farmland, Cultural Landscapes and Vistas

Issues of growth and development loom heavy in the minds of Castroville's residents and leaders. Over the past 20 years, San Antonio has developed predominantly to the north and east, allowing Castroville to remain largely unaffected. San Antonio has made its plans clear to annex land and grow westward. As this trend moves forward, unincorporated farmland outside of



Castroville, especially along Highway 90, becomes a prime target for speculative and large-scale commercial development. The impact of this trend on the character, landscape, quality of life and economy of Castroville is far reaching, as there is no land use authority to monitor and guide the direction and look of this development.

The loss of farmland and open space and its replacement with subdivisions and highway-oriented development was a primary issue explored at the community-wide visioning workshop. Participants selected eight images of farmland and hills preserved for the future and added comments about the importance of maintaining farming as a viable land use around the city. In addition, participants selected two images of steeples dominating the view of their town. An image of a large water tower elicited comments about considering a more friendly design and considering ground-level water containment. Two images of housing developments were also selected, one New Urbanist in layout with neo-traditional houses, the other with tract housing. The tract housing subdivision received negative comments about it.

Highway 90 — “Anywhere USA”

Highway 90 is a historic intrusion that divides the original layout and grid of Castroville in half. It is the main thoroughfare through town, and thousands of cars travel it daily. While there is some evidence of Castroville’s unique sense of place along the highway, most would not know of the rich culture and architectural history hidden on either side of the road. Fast food chains, gas stations and typical automobile-oriented development dominate the character. Highway 90 is a pedestrian’s nightmare, both for resident and tourist. There is a marginal cross-walk at the intersection of the highway at Fiorella, no turning lanes, medians or continuous sidewalks to facilitate ease of walking along or across the highway.

Residents of Castroville are concerned that Highway 90 is on its way to becoming “Anywhere USA.” Taskforce discussion focused on how to draw people off the highway and into historic Castroville. Many exercises at the visioning workshop focused on potential improvements to the highway to make it a more pedestrian-friendly “gateway” to Castroville. The vast majority of participants voted for and selected simple improvements to the highway, including street lamps, better signage, a center median with well-defined turning lanes, crosswalks made out of brick pavers or contrasting material.

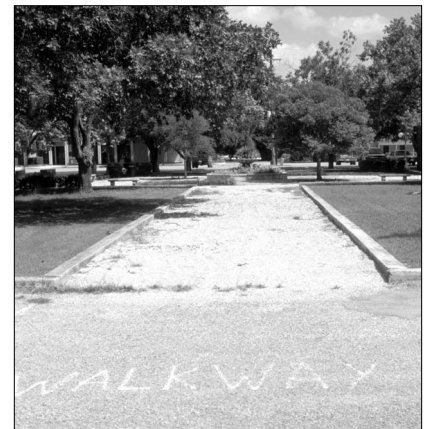
Concern also centered around the predominance of typical fast-food chain design and the need to enforce design guidelines for new construction and landscaping along the highway.

Heritage Tourism and Economic Development

Castroville residents feel strongly about balancing the growth of tourism with the maintenance and growth of a community-based economy and identity. Castroville is a cultural and heritage tourism goldmine, and residents are excited about capitalizing on this while creating a better quality of life. Three primary commercial areas were identified in Castroville: Highway 90, Houston Square and the Old Main Street (a section of the Old San Antonio Road along Fiorella and Paris).



U.S. Highway 90 bridge approaching historic Castroville



Houston Square



The Kiefer/Wemette Brewery & Saloon on Fiorella, built in 1870

Houston Square is primarily a center for civic, religious and social functions. Most of the buildings are occupied except for the old post office, the theater, and the old mill building just off the square. Parking around a central green space dominates the square. There is some retail on the square, and it is a tourist destination for special events and markets. There is an art gallery, several antique stores, dentist and doctor's offices, meat market, bank, beer hall, church, abstract company, a few restaurants, a B&B and the old hospital. Residents see the mixed-use revitalization and physical enhancement of Houston Square as the key to building heritage tourism and economic growth.

Buildings along the old highway, jogging along Fiorella to Paris, have the potential for retail activity growth and can serve as a vital connection between the Highway 90 thoroughfare and Houston Square. Many historic commercial buildings, some dating to the 1860s and 1870s, are vacant and prime resources for sensitive adaptive use and rehabilitation.

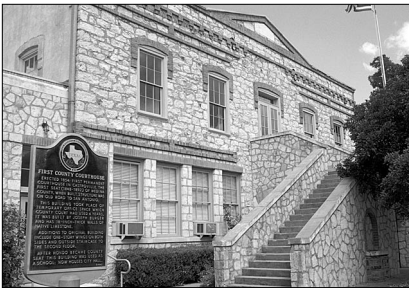
Taskforces identified the importance of forging partnerships with local and regional groups to promote Castroville as a heritage tourism destination and being proactive in recruiting groups to visit. Physical improvements along the highway, including signage, gateways, and streetscaping, were also identified as key factors to attract potential visitors off the highway and into town.

Education/Communication

The common theme of all the issues that Castroville explored was the need to educate and communicate the benefits, meaning and activities of historic preservation to the community. Without effective educational materials targeted to the many stakeholders of Castroville, preservation efforts will be hampered. It is critical for preservation to be an open forum in which the community feels an active and desired participant. Through clear and regular communication with opportunities for feedback, preservation can be a positive experience for all members of the community.

Political Commitment

The leadership and commitment to historic preservation by Castroville's leaders and elected officials is imperative to making any significant progress. The taskforces and this visioning process were well supported by many elected officials, from the city and county, including the mayor of Castroville, the Medina County judge, and many city council members and county commissioners. It is critical to maintain and expand this support for preservation. Participants of the visioning workshop affirmed the taskforce recommendation that elected officials be committed to increasing preservation activity in Castroville, and that residents of the city work diligently to keep their officials well-informed and educated about important issues and activities.



Castroville City Hall, originally the second county courthouse, built in 1879 with modifications in the 1930s



ACTION PLAN

Castroville's vision and goals are the inspiration and foundation of the preservation action plan. The vision establishes the big picture of what Castroville desires to be — an affirmative statement for the future.

Castroville's preservation goals provide the basis for specific actions carried out by a variety of individuals and entities. This section reflects at times verbatim the goals and actions developed and prioritized by the taskforces, and affirmed by the community at the visioning workshop.

The goals and actions are not set in stone, but rather are a road map to a specific destination. They are also not mutually exclusive. All goals reinforce one another, and several actions appear in multiple goals. All actions are cross-referenced where they repeat.

Actions are organized by the goal they are primarily associated with, as well as the time frame in which they will occur. Timeframes for priorities are designated with the numbers 1, 2, 3:

- 1 designating Ongoing, Immediate, Short term (1-2 years)
- 2 designating Mid term (2-3 years)
- 3 designating Long term (4 or more years)

Vision

Castroville is a community where its residents are leaders in preserving and protecting their unique historic, cultural and natural environment and effectively use it as the foundation for economic prosperity, tourism, managed growth and an excellent quality of life. Castroville is a community that simultaneously maintains its rural identity and sense of place while shaping and benefiting from regional growth.

Goals

1. Protect the historic character and buildings of Castroville through progressive preservation policies
2. Effectively communicate and educate the public on the importance of preserving Castroville's history, culture and character
3. Develop heritage tourism and encourage economic development through preservation.
4. Undertake physical improvements to enhance Castroville's historic character
5. Be proactive about shaping the growth and development outside the city limits
6. Develop a coordinating committee to implement Castroville's Preservation Plan



**Vernacular Alsatian house modified
in the 1950s**



**Vernacular Alsatian with a classical
revival porch**

Actions

GOAL 1

Protect the historic character and buildings of Castroville through progressive preservation policies

1.1 Develop user-friendly ordinance that is incentive-based and enforceable

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Protects range of significant buildings and structures in Castroville that are individual landmarks or within the local historic districts
- Design review for new construction in historic districts
- “User friendly” – clear procedures with limited hassles
- Designate core area of district based on resources categorized as landmark to medium status on inventory, with transition area where design review and the ordinance is encouraged through incentives
- Work with CLG program director on regular review and updating of ordinance

1.2 Develop illustrated design guidelines for the historic districts in Castroville

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Include standards for setback, height, lot coverage, massing, site plan requirements, materials and fenestration for new construction
- Appropriate treatments for existing historic resources
- Landscaping and streetscaping
- Outbuildings

1.3 Verify, update and use Historic Resources Survey and Inventory

Priority: 1 (ongoing)

Partners:

- Public relations program for preservation — educate property owners on how they can review and correct information on their property
- Ongoing updates and systematic review every five years
- Incorporate survey data in Historic Review Board Certificate of Appropriateness process
- Long term: develop inventory into database that cross-references Certificates of Appropriateness

1.4 Hire a preservation planner using city or grant funding

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Position will be staff to Historic Review Board and will administer preservation program and plan



- Other duties can include supporting the Planning & Zoning Commission and design review of Highway 90, and working on economic development and heritage tourism strategies
- Look into feasibility of funding position if limited money is available, such as half-time shared position
- Work with Visionaries staff to develop job description

1.5 Evaluate city ordinances to ensure compatibility with historic character

Priority: 2

Partners:

- Evaluate land use, site planning requirements and building standards
- Make sure general requirements for setbacks, height, lot coverage and placement of outbuildings do not contradict with the existing historic form

1.6 Research and develop appropriate incentives for preservation

Priority: 2

Partners:

- Businesses – matching grants for façade improvements, signage, landscaping; permit fee rebates; tax abatement
- Homeowners – tax abatement; matching grant program for low-income historic homeowners
- Educate tax assessor on the negative trend of over-valuing historic properties

1.7 Develop proactive strategies for enforcement of preservation ordinance

Priority: 3

Partners:

- Building inspector training
- Ex-officio position on Historic Review Board for building inspector
- Educate property owners

1.8 Research and examine ways of incorporating preservation of cultural landscapes, historic landscapes and vistas into preservation ordinance

Priority: 3

Partners:

- Medina Canal
- Medina River
- Cross Hill
- Scenic Roads



**Dilapidated barn structure
in Castroville's historic district**



**Local marker for the Old Standby
Saloon on Fiorella**



1.9 Designate landmark and high priority properties as local, state and national landmarks

Priority: 3 (ongoing)

Partners:

- Research appropriate designations for significant properties not yet designated
- Encourage owners of significant buildings outside local district to designate their buildings as a local landmark
- Encourage designation of Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks



Vernacular Alsatian house with original log construction dog trot on Paris

GOAL 2

Effectively communicate and educate the public on preserving Castroville's history, culture and character

2.1 Create package of information on what it means to live in the historic district and be the stewards of Castroville's history and fabric

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Information includes process to apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness, design guidelines, Secretary of the Interior Standards

2.2 Involve and keep elected officials and agencies informed about what Castroville is doing in preservation

Priority: 1

Partners:

- City council
- County commission and judge
- County historical commission
- School district
- Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), Texas Historical Commission, Texas Commission on the Arts

2.3 Develop plan for museum/heritage center

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Detail concept, location options, content
- Research library and genealogy
- Artifacts reflecting story of Castro Colonies
- Cannot become "attic" collection
- Rotating exhibits telling the diverse history of Castroville



2.4 Education and information packet on preservation in Castroville targeted to different audiences

Priority: 2

Partners:

- Residents of non-historic homes
- Developers/realtors
- Business owners
- Newcomers
- Tourists
- Elected officials (see 2.2)



Vacant and dilapidated vernacular Alsatian house on Paris

2.5 Series of local newspaper articles on Castroville history and preservation

Priority: 2

Partners:

2.6 Educate youth of Castroville on its history, culture, architecture and importance of preservation

Priority: 3

Partners:

- Work with teachers and students on developing curriculum about Castroville history and architecture
- Explore how Alsatian language can become part of school curriculum as an elective

2.7 Implement plan for museum/heritage center

Priority: 3

Partners:

2.8 Develop video teaching Alsatian

Priority: 3

Partners:

GOAL 3

Develop heritage tourism and encourage economic development through preservation

3.1 Leverage local, regional, statewide and international partnerships to advertise and promote what Castroville offers the heritage tourist

Priority: 1 (ongoing)

Partners:

- Promote Castroville to San Antonio tourist companies and the convention and visitors bureau (register/membership, personal contact and persistence)
 - City/chamber partnership for funding advertisement for Castroville
- Sustain partnership with Alsace



Stencil painting above window on the Old Planing Mill on London



- Partner with Alamo Area Council of Governments
- Forge working relationship with Hondo and surrounding communities to market each other and involve them in Castroville's events
- Explore state partnerships and avenues for advertising and marketing — THC's web site, TxDOT, Texas Commission on the Arts, etc.

3.2 Develop the web “network” for promoting Castroville

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Improve/update www.Castroville.com
- Secure links to Castroville on web sites
- Regional and statewide agencies and organizations
- Nature organizations
- Travel centers
- Tourism web sites

3.3 Develop plan for the Steinbach House and the property around it

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Research history of the Steinbach House and develop interpretive program to promote Alsatian heritage
- Living history or performances at the Steinbach House
- Tourist information center
- Signage

3.4 Identify local model businesses and programs and their success

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Sammy's Restaurant and Moyer Center
- Create “best practices” for local businesses in historic buildings



**Paris streetscape looking to
Houston Square**

3.5 Encourage appropriate commercial uses along Fiorella and Paris leading to Houston Square

Priority: 2

Partners:

- Identify uses for vacant and underused buildings and recruit businesses and artisans that complement Castroville's historic character, are community-based but still support the tourist industry
 - Quality antique shops
 - Small inn, bed and breakfast or hotel
 - Blacksmith
 - Woodworker/carpentry
 - SAS Shoe Company



- Pottery
- Candy/confectioner/chocolate/ice cream
- Jeweler
- Winery
- Nursery
- Coffee shop
- Collectible bookstore
- Good grocery store
- Country/general mercantile store such as Rio Medina and possibly locate in the old Tondre Store
- Fabric store
- Cooking supplies/kitchenware
- Tea room
- Deli/lunchroom with soup and sandwiches
- Feed store
- No Wal-Mart



Houston Square looking west

3.6 Develop the square as a vital retail center

Priority: 2

Partners:

- Strong support network to encourage and sustain small business on square
 - Information (see 2.3 and 3.8)
 - Incentives
 - Gateway and signage to divert cars off Highway 90
 - Tours
 - Promotions
 - Special events (see 3.3)
- Work with local realtors to market historic commercial properties in Castroville to potential businesses
- Encourage residents of Castroville to shop locally and support the businesses and restaurants on or near the square
- Organize a “First Thursday” open house once a month for businesses on the square

3.7 Ensure the special events in Castroville and products sold are high quality

Priority: 2

Partners:

- Target demographics for attendance
- Develop standards for set up and format of special events
- Market products unique to Castroville (Alsatian crafts, art, food, etc.)



Dilapidated Alsatian house

3.8 Develop a “model” Alsatian house (partner with task 3.9)

Priority: 3

Partners:

- Acquire a vacant Alsatian vernacular house to fix up
- Furnish with donated antiques
- Open regularly for tours, receptions, etc.

3.9 Develop museum/heritage center (see 2.3 and 2.7)

Priority: 3

Partners:

- Research library and genealogy
- Artifacts reflecting the story of Castro colonies
- Cannot become “attic” collection
- Rotating exhibits telling the diverse history of Castroville



The medina River under the Highway 90 bridge

GOAL 4

Undertake physical improvements to enhance Castroville’s historic character

4.1 Sponsor TransTexAlliance pedestrian workshop

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Look into partnering with neighboring communities to co-host
- Free workshop, but community must host trainer

4.2 Form taskforce to work with TxDOT on plans for enhancing pedestrian friendliness of Highway 90

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Explore what is possible (short- and long-term solutions) — medians, turning lanes, landscaping, streetscaping, signage, cross-walks, bridge enhancements, gateway
- Strategies for slowing traffic to increase commerce along Highway 90, encourage drivers to come into Castroville and increase pedestrian safety
- Grants and funds

4.3 Develop comprehensive plan for pedestrian access to attractions in Castroville

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Footbridge between Steinbach House and Landmark Inn
- Develop nature/heritage trail along Medina River linking to Regional Park – acquisition of right-of-way
- Pedestrian-friendly enhancements to Highway 90



- Cohesive interpretive signage throughout town
- Consistent “marking” of key areas or historic tour (planter design, street lamps, banners, etc.)

4.4 Pursue partnerships and communication to encourage compatible development along Highway 90

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Watch-dog group monitoring property for sale and buyers
- Assemble educational materials and “Welcome to Castroville” packet to mail to buyers its unique history and character, in addition to its voluntary design review process

4.5 Develop simple and cost-effective strategies for streetscaping and landscaping along Highway 90 through town that keep with Castroville’s historic character

Priority: 2

Partners:

4.6 Create incremental enhancements to public squares and parks

Priority: 2

Partners:

- September Square – simple landscaping to create gateway effect, promotion of square for public use (picnics, gathering space), benches
- Houston Square – more green space, less parking, signage, landscaping along sidewalks
- Regional Park – work with Park Board and Regional Park Plan for preservation and marking of private cemetery

4.7 Improved signage for historic district

Priority: 2

Partners:

- Sign toppers
- Subject markers
- Signage for historic commercial areas — Fiorella and September Square

4.8 Improve pedestrian linkages between landmarks and historic district, cultural attractions and natural areas

Priority: 3

Partners:

- Enhance/expand signage and markings for historic walking tour
- Work with Texas Parks & Wildlife and Friends of the Landmark Inn for improvements and addition of interpretive signage along Medina River at Landmark Inn Complex, i.e. Grist Mill, Raceway, etc.



Streetscape at the intersection of Fiorella and Paris



4.9 Develop gateway concept in keeping with Castroville's character and using its existing assets to the greatest extent

Priority: 3

Partners:

- Bridge enhancements with lighting, signage, plantings
- Definition of intersection of Highway 90 and Fiorella — Landmark Inn, September Square and the entrance to Castroville's historic commercial corridor along Fiorella
- Steinbach House

4.10 Develop incentive program for landscaping and improvements in keeping with design guidelines and plan for physical improvements

Priority: 3

Partners:

- Matching grant program
- Waiving of permit/development fees
- Tax abatement



Mona's Tacos along U.S. Highway 90 entering Castroville



Land for sale along CR 471 in Medina County

GOAL 5

Be proactive about shaping the growth and development outside the city limits

5.1 Develop strategies to manage growth outside city limits

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Begin discussions with Medina County Commission, Alamo Area Council of Governments, City of San Antonio on projected growth and impacts
- Organize county roundtable on regional and county growth and invite speakers from American Planning Association, Texas Municipal League, American Farmland Trust and other interest groups

5.2 Work proactively with developers on plans and designs for new development outside the city limits

Priority: 1

Partners:

- Watch-dog group monitoring properties for sale and buyers
- Assemble educational materials and "Welcome to Castroville" packet to mail to prospective buyers about its unique history and character
- Arrange for friendly meeting with buyers on their plans for the property



5.3 Develop strategies to protect significant historic properties outside the city limits

Priority: 2

Partners:

- Begin discussions with Medina County Historical Commission and Castro Colonies in order to identify endangered historic properties
- Hit list of properties for sale
- Communication with owners on future of property and if they plan to sell
- Marketing piece to connect good stewards with historic properties for sale

5.4 Work with and educate property owners along Highway 90 about the importance of farmland preservation

Priority: 3

Partners:

- Educate property owners on tools such as conservation easements
- Provide information on grants and programs available from Department of Agriculture, American Farmland Trust, etc.

GOAL 6

Develop coordinating committee to implement Castroville's Preservation Plan

6.1 Taskforces and community reassemble and volunteer to be on coordinating committee

Priority: 1

- Representatives of different organizations, elected officials, volunteers, etc.
- Recruit new members – new blood
- Draft a mission statement
- Elect a chair and vice-chair
- Form working subcommittees based on goals

6.2 Coordinating committee attends leadership and implementation training

Priority: 1

6.3 Subcommittees select priority project for implementation

Priority: 1

- Select project that is easily achievable or of urgent nature
- Identify and recruit necessary partners to undertake project
- Develop more detailed timeline and list of sub-tasks
- Delegate tasks to committee members and volunteers



Castroville's taskforce members examining results of the visioning workshop





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RESOURCES

FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

National Trust for Historic Preservation: “Information” Series

- Maintaining Community Character: How to Establish a Local Historic District
- Design Review in Historic Districts
- Reviewing New Construction Projects in Historic Districts
- Basic Preservation Procedures
- Buyers Guide to Older and Historic Houses

Guidelines for Historic Buildings

- The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Illustrated Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings
- National Park Service: “Preservation Briefs” series
- Cleaning of Masonry Buildings
- Roofing for Historic Buildings
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- Repair of Historic Windows
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This Old House Journal

Preservation

The official magazine for members of the National Trust for Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation Forum

Published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation

Journal of the Association for Preservation Technology

Published by the Association for Preservation Technology

Traditional Building: The Professional's Source for Historical Products

Preservation Web Sites

■ Texas Historical Commission

www.thc.state.tx.us

■ THC database of historical markers, National Register properties, data and survey records

www.thc.state.tx.us/atlas

■ Texas Department of Economic Development

www.tded.state.tx.us/commerce

■ National Register of Historic Places

www.cr.nps.gov/nr/nrhome.html

■ National Park Service Preservation Programs

www.cr.nps.gov

■ National Trust for Historic Preservation

www.nationaltrust.org

■ Preserve/Net

www.preservenet.cornell.edu/preserve.html

■ National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers

www.achp.gov

■ Preservation Action

www.preservenet.cornell.edu/pa.htm

■ Colorado Preservation Information Network

www.copin.org

■ American Association for State and Local History

www.aaslh.org

■ Association for Preservation Technology

www.apti.org

■ National Center for Preservation Technology and Training

www.ncptt.nps.gov

■ National Main Street Center

www.mainst.org



- American Planning Association
www.planning.org
- Partners for Sacred Places
www.sacredplaces.org
- African American Studies at Columbia University
www.cc.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/subjects/afam/afambibl.html
- Society of Architectural Historians
www.sah.org
- Society for American Archeology
www.saa.org